

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-14

NEW YORK TIMES
7 February 1985

Schlesinger Says Distrust Hinders Foreign Policy

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Feb. 6 — Former Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger asserted today that President Reagan's main difficulty in winning support for his Pentagon budget, Nicaragua policy and missile defense proposal was Congressional distrust of Administration objectives and credibility.

"A national consensus cannot simply be wished into being," he told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. "It can be restored only gradually over time, if at all. It will come about only through the development of mutual trust, reasonable success and the sustained credibility of the executive branch."

In a review of American foreign policy, Mr. Schlesinger called President Reagan's hope for a total strategic defense to protect American cities an illusory plan that would cost "well over half a trillion dollars and probably will exceed a trillion." Moreover, he said, the "Star Wars" proposal shatters political consensus by breaking with nation's past strategic doctrine.

The Budget's Influence

Mr. Schlesinger, who has served in both Republican and Democratic Administrations, asserted that "there is no way" the Administration can sustain its military buildup in the face of enormous deficits without a tax increase. So long as there are sharp divisions on the budget, he added, it is virtually impossible to obtain a consensus on foreign policy.

On Central America, he said the debate over whether to resume aid to Nicaraguan rebels was less influenced now by policy considerations than by the breakdown of trust between the executive and legislative branches of government because, he said, the Administration had not openly spelled out clear and consistent objectives.

"Nicaragua has moved beyond a substantive issue to an issue of trust between the two branches," he said in response to questioning by Senator Richard G. Lugar, the committee chairman, who has organized hearings on

the broad scope of foreign policy.

"That issue of distrust has to be resolved," Mr. Schlesinger added. "This is an issue that transcends the oversight function of the intelligence committees because they are not charged with judging policy."

The central theme of his broad-gauged assessment of American power and commitments abroad was that no administration could sustain a policy unless it maintained credibility with Congress. He drew on his experience as Secretary of Defense under Presidents Nixon and Ford, Director of Central Intelligence under President Nixon and Energy Secretary under President Carter.

Under questioning by Senator Larry Pressler, a South Dakota Republican, Mr. Schlesinger quickly took issue with President Reagan's hope that his "Star Wars" proposal would render nuclear weapons obsolete.

"The notion of a defense that will protect American cities is one that will not be achieved, but it is that goal that supplies the political magic, as it were, in the President's vision," he said. But he found a more limited defense, shielding American land-based missiles "well worth examining."

Mr. Schlesinger took sharp issue with estimates that a limited defense would cost only about \$60 billion. That, he said, was an unconvincing estimate and a come-on price to gain support. The actual costs, he said, would be much higher but could not be known until more research was done.

In a broadly analytical opening statement, Mr. Schlesinger asserted that since the early postwar period Amer-

ican foreign policy had suffered from two major problems: first, a decline in American power without a matching decline in overseas commitments, and second, a breakdown in the political consensus behind foreign policy since the Vietnam War, which brought increasing Congressional assertiveness.

Despite Congressional cries for reducing American commitments abroad, Mr. Schlesinger argued against moves to "reduce or jettison" such commitments, saying these might embolden "predatory powers" to challenge American interests.

He sided with Secretary of State George P. Shultz in his policy debate with Secretary of Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger, who has argued against American involvement in wars abroad without public approval in advance.

"I cannot concur with the emerging belief that the United States must only fight popular, winnable wars," he said. "The role of the United States in the world is such that it must be prepared for, be prepared to threaten and even be prepared to fight those intermediate conflicts that are likely to fare poorly on television."

He said he meant conflicts between such "glorious little wars" as the quick seizure of Grenada and a longer, full-scale conventional war in Europe.

But under questioning by Senator Christopher J. Dodd, a Connecticut Democrat, he warned repeatedly that the Administration would have to make greater efforts to restore its credibility with Congress by setting out its objectives clearly.